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ABSTRACT

Statistics on teenage pregnancy, the rate of venereal disease, and media representations of sexual mores are offered as rationale for the inclusion of sex education in the elementary-secondary school curriculum. The program of the George Mason Junior-Senior High School (Falls Church, Virginia) is described and used as a model for the discussion of strategies in program planning and development. The six-year-old program, presented in sixth, eighth, ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, was developed after a full year of study involving faculty, clergy, medical persons, parents, and community leaders. This careful planning period has been followed up twice-yearly with a community-school committee review and yearly with a parent meeting. Four questions are seen as being at the heart of any family life/sex education course: (1) What should be taught? (2) At what grade levels should the facts of the program occur? (3) How should the material be included in the curriculum? and (4) Who should teach the courses and what type of training should these persons have? General planning strategies for the resolution of these questions are presented. Stressed as basic to the George Mason program are two factors; (1) sexual identity is at the central core of human existence; and (2) human sexuality is a serious academic subject. (MJB)

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GUESS WHO'S PREGNANT? SEX EDUCATION

According to a recent Gallup poll, a "sharply increasing" number of Americans feel that sex education has a definite place in the public schools. The main reason seems to be the growing national concern over teenage pregnancies. Sex education in the schools was favored by 77% of the survey respondents, a 12% increase over a similar poll taken in 1974. 69% said sex education classes should include information about the different birth control techniques, as compared to 36% who favored this in the earlier poll. And making contraceptive devices more readily available to all teenagers was favored by 56%. President Carter's budget requests for fiscal 1979 support this trend, providing $142 million for programs to help prevent teenage pregnancies. HEW Secy. Joseph Califano Jr. has said that although he favors the use of the schools to educate young people about sex and about birth control, he cannot tell the schools either what to do or how to go about it. But the issue should be looked at in a "morale" context, he said. (Education U.S.A. Washington, D.C. January 30, 1978).

Depending on your perspective and statistical frame of reference, you may agree with those who declare that 1 million pregnancies to girls and women aged 15-19 each year; some of whom reside in your community and mine, is an epidemic. You may also find it difficult to believe that an additional 30,000 girls younger than 15 also get pregnant annually. Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest to you that children bearing children is the ultimate form of child abuse. How are the million teenage pregnancies to 15-19 year olds resolved? In 1974:

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-- 280,000 (28%) resulted in marital births that were conceived following marriage.

-- 100,000 (10%) resulted in marital births that were conceived prior to marriage.

-- 210,000 (21%) resulted in out-of-wedlock births.

-- 270,000 (27%) were terminated by induced abortion.

The remaining 140,000 (14%) resulted in miscarriages. Of the additional 30,000 pregnancies experienced by girls younger than 15, 13,000 (45%) were terminated by abortion, and 11,000 (36%) resulted in out-of-wedlock births. Only 1800 (6%) ended in marital births, and virtually all of these resulted from pregnancies conceived out of wedlock. (11 Million Teenagers).

I feel certain that most of you would agree that the problem of teenage pregnancy alone should motivate us to consider special instructional programs and requires the attention of educators and the attention of concerned human beings. There are other, however, additional reasons for considering education about human sexuality.

Consider as well the high incidence of venereal disease. Add to that concern the bombardment of our young people with pornography. And then there is the availability, easily available, so called adult magazines - Penthouse, Playboy, Oui, Hustler, Screw and others. Society permits and in a sense encourages easy access for our young people to condoms, foams, vaginal jellies for sale on supermarket and drugstore counters. No instructional prerequisite needed to buy! The media regularly present news and stories describing in detail cases of rape and homosexuality. I offer as an example, a recent airplane hijacking in which there was the holding of hostages until the hijacker's male lover was released from prison; and the ultimate in free and easy information and suggestion about sexuality - National TV - James at 15 - having his first experience with sexual intercourse and clearly without the use of contraception.

How does "James at 15" on National TV having sexual intercourse fit with your value systems and the values of the majority of this community's parents? Who do we think we're kidding when we act as if sex education is not going on? Not only is it happening, but our young people are being given information and opportunity which I submit to you is probably counter to the value system of most of us and most of our communities. It's not starting sex education that we're talking about. It's correcting misinformation, helping kids build upon family and religious value systems, and expanding upon information which has already been given to them. As the father of two teenage sons and a 12 year old daughter, I wish for instructional reinforcement by the schools of my teaching as a parent in the areas of education about responsibility toward others and quality in relationships. I agree with the Rev. Joseph L. Bernardin, Archbishop of Cincinnati, who in the Sunday New York Times of January 22, 1978, addressed the issue of responsibility and relationship in an article about "Abortion and Teen-Age Pregnancy". His words "there is no such thing as sex without consequences, whether these be emotional, physical, social or all three". He recommends our telling young people early what they need to know that "Sex is not merely for fun or for the expression of transitory affection. It is an enriching and serious business between mature people who are emotionally, socially, and even economically able to accept the consequences, of which pregnancy is hardly the only one." We agree and support his contention that education about sexuality is needed. He believes, and we agree, that there should "be education in such things as family values, a healthy and integrated acceptance of sexuality, stability in marital relationships, a sense of obligation toward other persons,

and willingness to accept the consequences of our actions". The goal of family life and sex education should be to help young people to "grow up as sexually mature adults".

Some would say that school boards and school administrators must be more aggressive and provide more leadership at initiating and developing sex education programs in our schools. Aggressiveness in the area of sex education is not, in my opinion, healthy for professional educators, nor do I believe that too much aggressiveness is the way in which we will successfully bring about implementation of programs about human sexuality. There is little doubt, now more than ever, that communities expect aggressiveness from the educators in other areas such as reading, writing, and math computation. However, educator's roles in an area as emotionally laden and as personal as sexuality, are much more limited. The role of school boards and school administrators should be that of facilitators and orchestrators of community feeling and desire. It is our hope that by telling the Falls Church story and describing to you our experiences in family life and sex education, even though our school size and community may differ, that you may be encouraged and perhaps leave with some thoughts and pieces of information which may have value in sex education efforts in this community.

At George Mason Junior-Senior High School in Falls Church, Virginia, 8 miles from Washington, D.C., our experience in the area of family life and sex education has been as a result of the organization, planning and implementation of our own program over the past six years. The program we presently offer was developed after a full year of study involving faculty, clergy, medical persons, parents and community leaders. There was, and we continue to have, an openness and honesty in communication with our parents and our

community, along with an effort to constantly maintain that communication. We continue to have an up-to-date community school committee to review the status of the program twice yearly, and we hold a parent meeting once a year for questions and comments. We offer family life and sex education content in four areas - 6th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, and 11th and 12th grade. The sensitive issues of abortion, contraception, homosexuality and masturbation are dealt with as appropriate to student maturity and the content being studied.

The 9th grade course is in science rather than in health in order to permit students and parents freedom of choice -- health being a required subject in Virginia. Our experience has been that even though the ninth grade class is an elective, more than 80% of our students choose it. In addition to the elective nature of the science offering, the program was integrated into science because of the particular qualities and capabilities of the instructional staff. One male and one female teacher began, working as a team during the first two years. Both teachers were particularly well respected by students and community. For the past four years, Mary Lee Tatum, a teacher with a public health degree with a background in science and counseling, has taken over as our sex education teacher. The 9th grade course in life science is essentially human biology. The systems of the body, e.g. heart, respiratory, skeletal, reproductive and others are units of basic subject matter. Integrated throughout is the family life and sex education information and material. For example in discussing the cell, the morality of genetic research and abortion would be considered.

Our program continues to evolve in that two years ago we developed and had approved by our local committee and school board an 11th and 12th grade human sexuality nine-week seminar. Instruction in this seminar has the following objectives: 1) To understand how the human body functions as a sexual and reproducing being; 2) To assist in the development of maturity into manhood or womanhood with minimal anxiety and confusion over normal sexual development and function; 3) To understand the dynamics of family relationships involving stress, individuality, responsibility and fulfillment; 4) To value the individuality of each family member and encourage growth and development of each separate personality; 5) To understand the alternatives our culture offers for life styles which will enable rational decision-making on the basis of knowledge.

Eighth grade counseling groups have also been approved, and have as their goal discussion of human sexuality for those students who elect to become part of one of these groups.

Sixth grade sex education was approved by our School Board several weeks ago. Specifically, it is a three week elective program in science dealing with the human body.

We recognize that without parental and school support, our programs could not exist. We strive constantly to communicate effectively with these groups in order to continuously reassess our needs and make adjustments in our program as necessary.

In every case, instruction dealing with family life and sex education is of an elective nature and never required. We have always believed that those persons wishing not to be part of Family Life and Sex Education have a right not to be a part of it. However, we also believe those persons wishing to be a part of sex

education have the right to be a part of it.

In the book From Parent to Child the statement is made "Schools cannot and should not replace the personal relationship between parent and child or cancel the moral teachings of the Church; but a school program can be complementary to these, and alone is better than no sex education at all". The schools are the only institutions that can reach practically all the children over a substantial period of time. Both the easy to reach and the hard to reach students are there in the classroom. As an educational institution, the schools are able to pass on the wealth of knowledge about human development, human behavior, and family life.

Believing that the school should play an important role in education about human sexuality, we have developed a systematic approach to the organization of family life and sex education programs in schools. The terms family life and sex education, we believe, may be used synonymously and although including information about human reproductive systems, should have as their focus instruction about maleness and femaleness encompassing the sociological, psychological and physiological aspects of human growth, human relationships and general development.

G.E. used to say in their TV commercials that progress was their most important product. In developing a sex education program the motto should be process is equally as important as the product. The school's sex education program must never be seen as replacing the teachings of home and church, but must complement these institutions. It is important to realize, though, that there are many students who, for a variety of reasons, receive little or no serious sex education in either the family or religious group. The needs of these students must also be kept in mind in developing the family life and education program.

We believe that certain very sequential and orderly steps must be taken for the development of good Family Life and Sex Education programs. The process worked and works for us. We know that it has been useful to the development of Family Life and Sex Education in school systems in other areas of the country. Time and patience are critical ingredients.

As consideration is given to the establishment of Family Life and Sex Education programs, school and community must work together in making four very basic decisions: (1) what should be taught, (2) at what grade levels should the focus of the program occur, (3) how should Family Life and Sex Education material be included in the curriculum, and (4) who should teach the courses and what type of training should these persons have.

These questions must be answered and consensus reached by representatives of the schools and the community, all of whom must be willing to give of their time not to argue whether or not there should be sex education, but rather how much. Perhaps 15 or 20 people including parents, teachers from the disciplines in which sex education might be taught, representatives of various religious groups, a local pediatrician, the school nurse, school psychologist, and PTA president together with other school parents will comprise the committee. This community-staff committee as its first task should review materials and programs from other areas of the country. After becoming familiar with what is happening in sex education, the critical questions of who will the teachers be must be dealt with. Studies have shown that the selection of the teacher(s) is the most critical aspect of beginning a program - certainly more important that the subject area in which sex education is taught. Instruction can be developed in health, biology, the sciences,

home economics, social studies, or even English depending upon what you decide the emphasis should be.

It has been our experience that the teacher should meet three important criteria:

1) Someone who has the potential for gaining the trust of the faculty, community, and students.

2) Someone who has good rapport with students; an empathetic feeling, warmth, and understanding of the students with whom he/she is dealing.

3) Someone who has a comfortableness about sex-related terms and the content of a human sexuality course. This ease would, of course, improve with training.

After determining who the teacher or teachers will be, the community should move on to determine curriculum and grade level placement. In addition to considering who the teacher(s) should be, the issue of whether or not the course(s) should be required or elective must be dealt with. In this era of indecision and questioning of sexual values, for the school to require everyone's child to be in sex education programs - no matter how badly the educator believes the child may seem to need it, I am convinced that given a choice, parents will want their children in well conceived, planned, and carried out programs about human sexuality, taught by well prepared teachers of course.

The curriculum must be geared to the grade levels at which instruction is planned. We should teach sex education not as "now we will have a class in sex education", but in the broader context of the larger ideas of human personality, behavior, and sexual identity. Just as we would not discuss with a five year old complicated interactions between human beings so we should not discuss with that same five year old complex ideas about sexual behavior. We have to gear what we teach, when we teach

it, to the particular developmental level of the children we are teaching.

In determining curriculum the task of the school-community committee is to deal specifically with the kind of curriculum information they believe the community would be most comfortable with and then in great detail, write the curriculum. Issues such as: should the teacher be allowed to draw on the blackboard, will contraception education take place, will education about abortions, homosexuality, and masturbation be allowed. Additionally, the task of the committee is to write in detail the limits within which the teachers may operate. Which media, books, and materials will be allowed in the classroom, e.g., should contraceptives actually be brought into the classroom or even talked about at all. The task of designing and writing the curriculum could take as much as six months of regular meetings every two or three weeks. Designing the curriculum is a very critical step in the whole process.

After accomplishing who the teacher(s) will be, the grade levels at which sex education will be taught, and what will be taught, the Family Life and Sex Education Committee must aggressively seek to disseminate the information to the whole school community. Feedback from the community to the committee will result in either rewriting, or moving for acceptance by the school board as written.

Although, it may be decided that Family Life and Sex Education should be taught in many different areas and grade levels, it is our experience that starting at one grade level, perhaps the 7th, 8th, or 9th, makes more sense than beginning a program as sensitive as Family Life and Sex Education large scale at many grade levels. After the program has begun, review, discussion and changes worked through the continuing community-staff committee must take place.

In Family Life and Sex Education our work is never finished. The school and the community must work together regularly to insure the effectiveness of the program.

In closing, we wish to reassure any of you with doubts that after six years of Family Life and Sex Education in our school system, including instruction in the very sensitive areas, we do not believe our students are more sexually active, or that we have usurped family or religious teachings, or that we have taught concepts in opposition to community values. We believe and our School Board and community confirm by their continued support that our students have been helped in their development of their sexual maturity and that they are healthier young people because of it.

Finally I want to restate that the Falls Church City Program model is what our community wants for us. Every community must work out for themselves the kind and extent of program which best fits their values and needs. It would be reasonable to say that young people in Falls Church have similar needs, concerns and feelings as do young people in other communities, but how we address these concerns, feelings, and needs may or may not be the same. Each community must decide that for itself!

As a summary, we would wish to leave you with the following:

1. Programs about human sexuality just do not happen - they require patience, planning, great organization, and the involvement of the school and the community.

2. One sex education curriculum or model for all schools and all communities is not possible. The value system of each must be the primary focus around which sex education curricula are developed.

3. The role of the teacher and the teacher himself or herself is critical to the success of sex education programs.

4. Communication between the community and school even after programs are established is vital and must be ongoing.

5. Changing values, changing feelings, and a changing world requires constant examination and reexamination and change in curriculum and teaching strategies.

6. Developing family life and sex education programs takes time and the following of a very careful and deliberate process.

Don't be afraid, but proceed slowly. Our children and your children are crying out for help in a world giving them very confusing and mixed messages about sexuality. Remember that kids are getting "sex educated" every day from the world about them. Its not whether or not we want education about human sexuality, but rather what kind and how much.

The important objectives of our program deal with broad concepts of human existence and relationship, and specifically with sex-related subjects as they fit into those broad concepts.

1) If we came to the U.S. from another planet and were asked to assess the sexual mores of this culture, we would say that pornography, unrealistic romance pictured in movies and on T.V., dirty jokes at cocktail parties - in the best of homes - and most especially magazine depiction of the nude human body in various poses and proximities were obviously acceptable. What is not acceptable is any serious discussion of sexuality, identity, behavior, or feelings.

In light of the incredible blitz of irresponsible and ever-present stimulation and misinformation our children are exposed to, we must begin to recognize the necessity for a serious forum in which young people can express and hear expressed by their peers, the questions and anxieties produced in them by a culture which continuously broadcasts destructive mixed messages such as - "Sex is dirty, Save it for someone you love." The public school classroom dealing with sex education must be "no nonsense". The teacher deals with facts and a vocabulary which reflects an awe and respect for human existence. There are two assumptions necessary for this antidote to the "Sex Education" being beamed at us from the media:

(1) Sexual identity is at the central core of human existence. The first thing anyone wanted to know about you was whether you were a girl or boy, and one grows up and lives aware of that gender identity.

(2) Human sexuality is a serious academic subject. It is not "now-we-will-spend two-weeks-telling-about-sex." We have built the curriculum around larger ideas of classical education: a) the anatomy

and function of the human body as a whole entity, b) the psychological aspect of human existence as thoroughly integrated into that anatomy and function, c) the whole human being in relationship, and d) those relationships of human beings in the broader community or sociological considerations of relationship. - For instance: genetic pairing and the varieties of human beings on earth because of sexual reproduction is the context in which one can discuss genetic counseling (with its question marks of aborting or giving birth if genetic defect is known) and conception as it takes place in human sexual intercourse.

Students are being educated about sexuality either by positive or negative messages. Their candor is often refreshing. When one particular class was asked what they were first told about where they came from, after snickers about the stork a girl said, "I was told love created me". "How did you feel about that, Tina?" the teacher asked, "Oh, I knew I'd have to go ask someone else." We are in trouble if our adolescents are learning about loving in human relationships from the media and the magazines. Of course, the home is the primary educating institution (either by purpose or by default). Schools treat math, English, science, and social studies with serious demand and continue to educate by omission what probably concerns most adolescents more than anything -- peer behavior, peer demands on them, and their rapidly changing bodies.

The United States buys in heavily to a Victorian heritage on sex-related matters:

1) Children in elementary school are in an innocent latent period where sexual awareness is not a part of their lives -- so they do not need sex education at that age, a fallacy easily dispelled by any elementary school teacher.

2) At puberty, sexual development, feelings, and awareness burst upon them with great force, therefore we should remain silent about it or we might further stimulate them and even encourage them to experiment.

So when and where do they get good information? Most parents, when brought into the process of planning and given opportunity to meet with the teacher for input and exchange, are very positive about another significant adult dealing with this explosive subject with their budding young adults. Not only with information, but with the process of valuing and with their warmth as human beings. Listening carefully to what students say, taking every comment and question very seriously can result in building a self-esteem in them which can then support confident, knowledgeable decisions. That sounds easy, but in fact in this highly "controversial" area is most difficult. To preserve the integrity and esteem of the student and get accurate information to them is a constant challenge. The decisions adolescents make about their sexual behavior, it seems to me, can only be enhanced by having considered at great length that sexual behavior is a very serious matter and not dictated by locker-room mores (both mens and womens locker rooms!)

The teacher must incorporate certain skills into the classroom. There has to be some degree of understanding of group process, a lot of careful listening and warmth and empathy with the age group in the class. Knowledge of the developmental level of the students is essential. Most importantly, the teacher has to be serious and direct, not "cool" or sarcastic. Students will respect an adult dealing with this subject in a serious manner and that is so unusual to them that it gives a whole new aspect to the subject.

The last evaluation in last quarter's Senior Seminar said just that from a senior boy, honor student, all around athlete: "This is the first time I've ever heard my peers talk and talked to my peers about sex in a serious way. I can't believe what I've learned and how much thinking I've done. If we hadn't had this course, I would always have had the joking around attitude about sex linger in my life." His peers could talk that way because the class atmostphere, content, and direction was carefully, and seriously planned.